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ABSTRACT

In order to improve the reading methods course at The University of Texas, a program was designed based on tutorial instruction. At first children were brought into the university classroom, one child for every two tutors. The university students (tutors) became directly involved in teaching reading and in being responsible for children's achievement. However, despite the positive feedback from the students, children, and cooperating teachers, it was evident that the skills acquired from the course were not transferring to student teaching and/or actual teaching. An analysis of the problem suggested that the tutors were not learning how to cope with the reading instructional needs of groups of children. An attempt was made to improve the program by moving it into the public schools where a larger number of children and additional space were available. The tutors now could work with more than a single child and could become involved in planning "direct teach" and "pupil managed" tasks. Evaluation of the program was made in terms of behavioral changes in both tutors and tutees. References are included. (DH)

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PRESERVICE FIELDWORK EMPHASIS

presented at

Symposium: Preparing Specialists in Reading

Due to the wide range of reading abilities that will surely confront most teachers, it is difficult to conceive of any teacher as being something other than a "reading specialist." While this thinking may conflict with the images of the reading skills specialist who works only with a subject called reading, the highly skilled generalist view seems necessary as we prepare elementary undergraduates for the real world.

Our previous "real world" preparation has been a "reading methods course" and something else called "student teaching." Samplings of the impact of this dynamic duo on recent graduates in the firing line suggests the following (IDEA, 1967):

The methods course is: so theoretical that it has no contact with reality
too much busy work
mostly a bull session.

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Student teaching is: cool
a real gas
the most valuable part of the program.

A closer look at such statements reveals that the methods courses are "bad news" because they are not usually associated with live children and real learning situations. Conversely, the positive perceptions of student teaching appear to reflect the students' satisfactions in learning by doing (even though many professors grimace at what they see the student teachers and teachers doing in the name of "reading instruction").

The professor's vantage point of the reading program operant in the student teacher's practicum semester and subsequent teaching tend to reveal the same old round of:

- children grouped by a divisor of three regardless of the range of differences in skill
- many unchallenged as well as frustrated children
- countless assignments of busy work that have no observable redeeming values
- the absence of legitimate reading tasks.

The Initial Approach

When we noted the negative student reactions to reading methods and positive reactions to student teaching, we set about the task of building tutorial based instruction that might lead to changes in the classroom (Guszak, 1969). The new program was built on these tenets:

1. The course must be practical in the sense that it must provide settings whereby the students can actually teach reading.

2. The student must be charged with the responsibility for children's reading achievement.

3. The knowledge objectives of the course must have direct relevancy to the students' on-going teaching.

4. Class discussions must focus primarily upon the actual teaching problems and needs of the students (university and elementary).

5. Children's skills must be clearly identified.

6. Alternative routes to skills instruction must be honored and subsequently evaluated.

Our first efforts involved the bringing of the children into the university classroom for direct tutorial work. Desks were moved to the walls and the former lecture hall took on a different look as some thirty tutors worked with fifteen children (tutors alternated).

The tutors were on their own in the tasks of determining instructional levels, reading expectancies, specific skills, etc. Actually, they were not "on their own" in the sense that the instructor and two undergraduate supervisors were always nearby to help if the going became too tough, as well as to offer assistance both before and after each day's tutoring.

For the most part, instruction was "direct teach" in the sense that the tutors were directly tutoring each child in the various skills perceived as needed.

Positive Feedback But Dubious Transfer

Four years into the tutoring program, we were receiving very positive feedback from the students, children, cooperating teachers, and various visiting firemen about the values of the program (Guszak, 1969). Despite such glowing responses, interviews with our ex-students raised the doubt in our minds about the transfer of the skills into (1) student teaching and/or (2) actual teaching.

"Why did the things not appear to be transferring?" was the gnawing question.

While speculations may fluorish, our own analysis suggested several things:

Our students were developing definite, observable skills in:

- determining appropriate instructional levels
- determining specific skills needs in word recognition and comprehension
- meeting specific needs with appropriate instruction.

However, they were not:

- receiving a close enough identification with the numbers problem that they would soon confront (numbers of students)
- mastering "pupil managed" learning systems which would be necessary for effective individualization
- developing organizers whereby they could manage classrooms where children were involved in a large number of reading tasks.

Something evidently had to be done if transfer was to be effected in such a way as to have a positive effect on reading instruction.

The Second Effort

To counteract the deficiencies in our program while maintaining the positive elements, we moved our program from within the walls of the university to the public schools where we could obtain (1) numerous children and (2) adequate instructional space. Instead of utilizing two tutors with a single child, we were able to have tutors working with more than a single child at each period. The buildup of teaching responsibilities necessitated the buildup in the arsenal of tutor skills. Now, the tutors had to develop contractual arrangements whereby they could work with more than a single child in "direct teach" tasks.

With greater teaching loads, the tutorial function has definitely taken on the broader dimensions of organizing and planning that will hopefully translate to even larger loads subsequently. To suggest that our students were immediately mastering the processes of planning "direct teach" and "pupil managed" tasks would be dishonest. Frankly, we're discovering things that we never realized before and possibly would have never confronted without the new venture. Nevertheless, the learning process seems to offer positive transfer benefits.

How Do You Measure Success?

It's temptingly easy for us to say, "Wow, we've got a great program!" especially when student evaluations echo such comments. Yet, the realization of greatness must stand more basic measures--specifically, those dealing with behavioral changes in both the (1) tutors and (2) tutees.

In seeking to discover the tutor's acquisition of new behavioral patterns, our initial measures have been in terms of specific behaviors sampled through observation and a series of mastery tests. The mastery tests utilize actual audio tapes of pupils and call for the tutors to make judgments about:

- specific instructional levels;
- specific skills needs;
- specific tasks for specific skills needs.

Subsequent plans call for the measurement through observation scales of the implementation of the above skills in student teaching as well as on-the-job.

The second area for program evaluation resides in the accountability factor of tutee growth. Each beginning reading tutee (of which there are many) is taped upon entry and exit to determine:

1. Entering and exiting instructional levels; e.g., came in reading PP2 and departed reading instructionally at mid-Primer.

2. Word recognition error rate at instructional level; e.g., came in reading 94% at PP2 and departed reading at 95% at mid-Primer.

3. Reading rate at entry and exit; e.g., 45 words per minute to 60 words per minute.

Although the breakdown is complicated, we are showing consistent gains in terms of entry and exit reading behaviors. Most impressive are the large gains that we wish to think we have had a major part in producing. Of course, we must ultimately develop controls that will permit us some degree of basis for generalization.

We're not sure we're doing a good job at all. We think that we shall find out soon, though.

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